

HOLE IN MY LIFE

by Jack Gantos

INTRODUCTION

In *Hole in My Life*, Jack Gantos recounts an experience from his own life that many other writers would rather keep hidden from public view. In the summer of 1971, the young Gantos, desperate for cash for college and willing to take a risk, runs a boatload of hashish from the Virgin Islands to New York City. For this job, he is to receive \$10,000. In reality, he gets a six-year prison sentence.

This hauntingly frank story is a slice-of-life autobiography that examines the events leading up to Gantos's decision to take part in illegal activities. He doesn't make excuses; he doesn't rationalize his behavior by saying he was young and foolish and impressionable. Instead, what Gantos does so wonderfully in this book is to confront the mistakes of his past head-on with no apologies.

Gantos talks about his less than stellar final year of high school, his restless search for something to do after graduation, and his rash decision to earn money quickly. Without a great deal of thought, he accepts an offer from an acquaintance, Rik, to help run a boat filled with hashish to New York. Once he and the skipper, Hamilton, are in the city, Gantos helps his cohorts sell the drugs. Then he begins to relax, telling himself that perhaps things will work out, that his part in this escapade will remain a secret. But that is not to be. Rik is busted and snitches before Hamilton and Gantos even arrive in New York. Unbeknownst to Gantos, all of his customers have been rounded up and have provided statements identifying him. Gantos is the last one to be caught and therefore cannot "cooperate" by providing names of drug contacts in St. Croix. At the trial, the prosecutor, stating his belief that Gantos is withholding information, recommends incarceration. Gantos's log of the journey is also used against him, and he is left to face severe consequences for his actions. The result: a sentence harsher than his companions'.

Once in prison, Gantos has the opportunity to reflect more sensibly on his career goal — to become a writer — and to set up a carefully developed plan for reaching it. At first the goal seems elusive. The harsh day-to-day existence inside the prison makes Gantos wonder if he will ever be able to realize any of his dreams. However, determination to prove himself propels Gantos forward into action, positive actions that ultimately lead to his release from prison and the beginning of his new life. Gantos's frankness and his ability to critically examine his impetuous youth blend seamlessly to create a story at once riveting with excitement while tempered with caveats for the reader. Never preachy, this book instead gives readers a chance to observe Gantos, to draw their own conclusions about his behavior, and, most important, to benefit from his experience.